
Labor Organization in the Platform Economy

Sarrah Kassem*¹

¹University of Tübingen – Allemagne

Résumé

It is important to contextualize the platform economy – often referred to as ‘sharing economy,’ ‘on-demand economy’ or ‘digital economy’- within the larger political-economic and social processes and developments in order to reflect on the many ways through which technology not only impacts us, but we, too, impact it. One of the many ways this mutually reinforcing, and dialectical relationship takes place, is how it organizes work and workers in the platform economy, and in the process alienates them from themselves and each other. The expressions of relations of alienation are directly tied to the real material (working) conditions which vary across digital platforms. The digital and online world is not separate and isolated from the physical and offline world. What happens online in the digital space is in every way real and deeply rooted in the development of capitalism and its material and social relations. My research asks how do these relations of alienation express and (possibly) manifest themselves differently across digital platforms and how do these relate to the organization of workers today? It is, however, important to not approach the debate from a fatalistic view, but to understand that workers have agency, and indeed claim it – by turning to both more traditional, but also alternative ways of organizing. By applying a historical materialist lens, I shed light on the different labor realities within the platform economy by comparing those in the e-commerce platform, Amazon.com, to those in its crowdsourcing platform, Amazon Mechanical Turk. My research aims at contributing to a political economic discussion that humanizes the platform economy and technology in order to grasp not only the masked relations of exploitation and alienation, but more importantly the possibilities for organization of those who have in many ways become part of the modern-day service proletariat.

Mots-Clés: platform economy, digital economy, gig economy, precarious work, labor organization, Amazon

*Intervenant